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A MONTHLY RECORD OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL SCIENCE.

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WITH PLATES A-M.

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[Title page]

PLATE L.

MAY, NOVEMBER, 1934.



SAME AS FIG. 4 IN "MAN," 1931, 301.



FIG. 4 (A). NEAR VIEW.



FIG. 15. DARK BRONZE FIGURE OF ELEPHANT



SAME AS FIG. 2 IN "MAN," 1931, 301.

GABI FIGURES FROM JEBBA AND TADA, MIDDLE NIGER

Photographs by Mr. S. W. Walker.

[Facing page 169]

M A N

A MONTHLY RECORD OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL SCIENCE

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XXXIV, 193-200

NOVEMBER, 1934

ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

Nigeria.

With Plate L.

Walker.

Gobi Figures and Edagi, First King of the Nupé. By S. W. Walker, District Officer, Ilorin Emirate, Nigeria.

In MAN, 1931, 261, Sir H. R. Palmer published an account of certain "representations of deities cast in metal . . . in the region round Jebba and Rába on the Middle Niger." I have recently had an opportunity of seeing these figures, and a fuller account of them may be of interest. For ease of reference the same numbers will be used as in Sir H. R. Palmer's article.

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[13]

2. The two Jebba figures (Plate M 1, 2, 3) are well known and stand almost unprotected in the midst of the village on Jebba island, close by a dilapidated hut, alleged to be consecrated to their worship. The photographs accompanying the above-mentioned article are clear, and no further description is here necessary other than certain observations which a comparison with the other figures evokes.

3. The other photographs (Plate M 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) show four of seven figures at Tada, a small Nupé fishing village on the high bank of a backwater of the Niger, some 25 miles east of Jebba and some five north of Shonga. They are kept in a round hut and, unlike the Jebba figures, are carefully tended. They are taken out and scoured every Friday, and the floor is thickly spread with clean white river sand.

4. The most noticeable figure is one of dark bronze, 3 feet 8 inches high, bearing a general resemblance to the male figure at Jebba, both in technique, decorative treatment and conventional form. Its head dress consists of what appears to be a tight-fitting helmet, from which hang five coils reaching to the waist. To the front and rear of the helmet are attached medallions which bear the device illustrated in fig. 9, consisting of a horned and mustachied face, surrounded by an interlacing design. Each medallion is surmounted by a crest behind which are models of birds as in fig. 10. The close-fitting gown reaches below the knees and is richly decorated with designs in low relief as in figs. 11 and 12. Round the neck hang a tasselled stole, a necklace and a chain bearing another medallion as in fig. 13. The design on the latter consists of a ramlike head surrounded by three birds which suggest the lesser hornbill.

5. Though the similarity of this figure to the male figure at Jebba is obvious, the differences are interesting. The quilted attire of the Jebba figure, with its dagger in front and quiver slung at the back, indicates a warrior in the act of drawing a bow, while the rich and perhaps magic ornamentation of the Tada figure may conceivably suggest a king, priest or civil official. The helmet of the former, like that of the latter, bears a medallion, but smaller, and decorated with the figure of a long-beaked bird similar to fig. 11. The top of the helmet is covered by what is now a tangled mass of bronze wire or 'shavings,' which, like the coils of the Tada figure, might be thought representations of hair, were it not for the fact that they appear attached to the cap or helmet.

6. Another of the dark bronze figures is of an elephant of somewhat slender body and long legs. It has a ridge along the back and is 2 feet high (Plate L, fig. 15).

7. The two remaining figures of dark bronze (Plate M 5) are of ostriches, 4 feet 4 inches and 3 feet 6 inches high respectively. Each has a curious plate on the back suggestive of a tortoise shell, only flatter.

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[November, 1934.

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778 8. Then, there are two figures which in appearance seem to be cast out of pure copper. One is foot 10 inches high, and represents a man standing with clasped hands. A small pigtail adorns the head, the eyes are very bulging, and the feet very big. The other (Plate M 6) is a remarkably realistic bit of modelling, and is as noticeable for this quality as No. 4 is for its formal decorative treatment.

9. There remains one small figure (Plate M 7, 8), 1 foot 4 inches high, apparently of pure brass. It is of a male figure of ungainly proportions and coarse features, holding a crook and wearing an apron. In addition, a small cotton cloth is tied round its loins.

10. No. 4 is very heavy, due probably to the fact that the clay core is still within the figure. The others are light and hollow. All are or have at one time been on shallow rectangular bases.

309 11. The first thing that strikes one about the figures as a whole is the difference in the material of which they are cast. All of them appear to be made by the *cire perdue* process. But, as has been indicated above, four are of dark bronze, two appear to be of pure copper, and one of brass. Only the three last-named are kept acoured. Another striking feature is the divergence of technique. It is impossible to think that there are less than three sources for these figures, not because of the difference in metal used but on account of the wide difference in treatment—unless, of course, they are copies of originals. However this may be, the designs on Plate M 2, 3, 4 are so distinctive and conventionalized that they must have had antecedents, and it is to be hoped that this article may have given sufficient data by which their origin can be traced.

793 12. The Village Head of Tada tells the following legend. The Chief of Atagara had a son called Shode who was a successful hunter but could not find a market for his meat. At that time the chief of a certain town called Wanta had a girl in his household whom he gave to Shode to cook the meat of the animals he killed. After a time she became with child by Shode. When he was about to return to his home, he brought her a charm and a loin cloth and told her to give them to her son when he was born, for a son it would be. Shortly after he had returned home, his father, the chief of Atagara, died and he succeeded to the chieftdom. Now, in those times when a new chief was installed, each town brought slaves, and it happened that this child Edegi, which the girl bore to Shode, was amongst them on this occasion. When the chief, Shode, saw Edegi, he recognized him by the charm and loin cloth, promoted him to honour and showed him much affection. Shortly before his death he called Edegi and told him that after his death he should gather all his property together and leave the country. At this the townspeople rose up in jealousy, but Edegi escaped and travelled up the Niger with his loaded canoes till he came to the neighbourhood of Bida. There he abandoned his chains because of their weight and passed on to Tafa in Bida territory, then to Tada, Gbere and Jebba, at each of which places he left either chains or ornamental figures. He got as far as Kwatashi in Bussa, and then returned or was driven back. His boat and poles were of bronze. They lie in the Ega river close to Muregi. Edegi sank himself and the boat because he could not elude his enemies. He was the first chief of the Nupe.¹

13. The information given in this account suggested further inquiry at Gbere, 15 miles east of Jebba, opposite Raba, the only one of the above-mentioned places that is situated in Ilorin Province. Owing to the phenomenal floods it was not possible to reach the village itself, but the chains were brought to Tada for inspection. There are five of them, measuring 33 feet 6 inches, 20 feet, 23 feet, 8 feet 8 inches and 7 feet 2 inches respectively, and all are much corroded. The links vary from 3 inches to 6 inches in length and are rectangular in shape. At the end of one chain is a circular link. The weight of all the chains is about 20 lbs.

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H51 14. The Ndeji and the Wangwa of Gbere say that the chains were used in pre-British days for strangling criminals. Executions were carried out in the bush by the Checho assisted by three youths. The present Checho who looks after the chains has not seen an execution, but the Ndeji

¹ Note.—According to the Bussa legend, Edegi was chief of Gbere. He came up the river as far as Kwatashi, and encamped on the east bank of the Niger. Sarkin Wawa sent to warn him that he was not destined to become ruler of this region and if he stayed death would be his portion. It was then low water, and Edegi walked

out to a large rock to receive the Wawa envoys.

When he heard their message he laid a curse upon the rock that any canoe that came near it would sink and any man that touched it would die. Edegi then departed down stream, but the rock remains and is still called Dutsin Edegi.

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[No. 188

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FIG. 9.



FIG. 10.



FIG. 11.

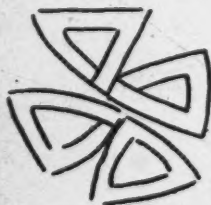


FIG. 12.

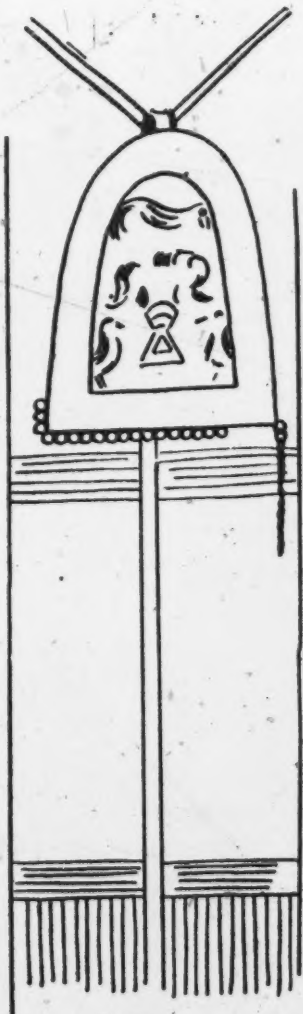


FIG. 13.

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696 and Wangwa claim to have done so. They state the chains were wound several times round the neck of the victim and the ends drawn tight till he was strangled.

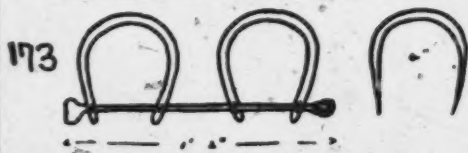


FIG. 14.

15. Besides the chains there were three pairs of manacles as in fig. 14, staple and neck collar.

16. Edogi's expedition or flight, whichever the case may be, is a well-known historical fact and, in the "Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria," compiled by Mrs. Temple, it is said to have taken place about 1505. A study of this curiously assorted group

of relics will hardly assist us in coming to definite conclusions about the nature of this incident or in understanding how Edogi came to found the Nupe state. But it provides interesting material for speculation.

S. W. WALKER.

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